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The Milestones and the Old Post Road

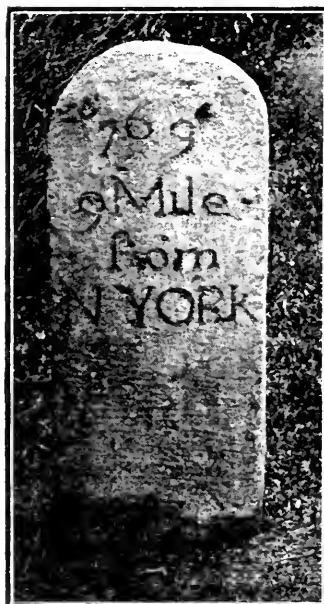
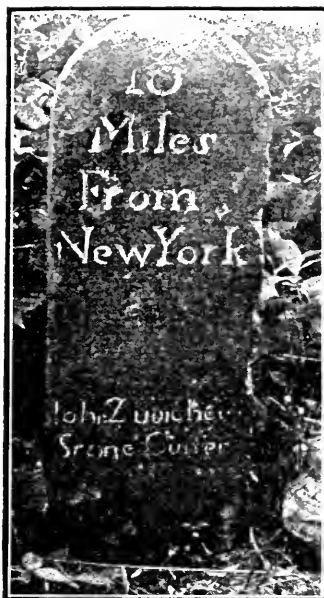
BY
GEORGE W. NASH, M.D.
AND
HOPPER STRIKER MOTT

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105 West 40th Street



15 MILESTONE
9 MILESTONE

1 MILESTONE
NEW UTRECHT

Photographed by G. W. Nash

THE CITY HISTORY CLUB AND MILESTONES

The Board of Aldermen has, by special enactment, transferred to the **City History Club** the care and maintenance of the milestones in Manhattan, and the Club expects to receive similar jurisdiction in the other boroughs.

Through a "Milestone Committee," the 15th Milestone, near Van Cortlandt Mansion (p. 184), has been firmly reset in its former location, thus saving it from destruction, and the 11th Milestone of Manhattan has been removed to Roger Morris Park and marked by a tablet (p. 159). Plans are now under way for the care of other stones in Manhattan and at Van Pelt Manor, near Utrecht. No. 9 Manhattan and the Richmond stone are already protected (pp. 151, 327), one by private means, the other through a historical society.

On May 31, 1915, the City History Club will mark Milestone No. I, Bowery opposite Rivington Street, and No. XII, in the front wall of Isham Park.

The City History Club obtains the means for this work by a voluntary tax paid by children enrolled in its study clubs and by general contributions.

See articles in the *Outlook* (June 24, 1909), "Along the Hudson in Stage Coach Days"; *Westchester County (N. Y.) Magazine*, "Some Westchester County Milestones" and "Some Bronx Milestones."

See also "The Greatest Street in the World—Broadway," by Stephen Jenkins; "The New York and Albany Post Road," by C. G. Hine.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE CITY HISTORY CLUB

(105 West 40th Street)

HISTORICAL EXCURSION LEAFLETS

- * No. I.—City Hall to Wall Street, 20 pp., 2 cuts, 4 maps; 10 cents.
- * No. II.—Greenwich Village and Lispenard's Meadows, 20 pp., 4 maps, 10 cents.
- * No. III.—The Bowery and East Side, 16 pp., 3 maps; 5 cents.
- * No. IV.—Central Park to Kingsbridge, 20 pp., 5 maps; 5 cents.
- * No. V.—The 19th Century City; 10th Street to 125th Street; 36 pp., 5 maps; 10 cents.
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- * No. X.—Historic Richmond, 24 pp., 3 maps; 10 cents.
- * No. XI.—Historic Queens, 36 pp., 5 maps; 10 cents.
- * No. XII.—Historic Brooklyn, Part II; 28 pp., 7 maps; 10 cents.
Milestones and the Old Post Road, 12 pp., 5 cuts; 10 cents.

*HISTORICAL GUIDE TO THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Includes the above Excursion Leaflets, several appendices and an alphabetical index; 450 pp., 70 maps and 46 illustrations. Cloth, small 12mo, \$1.50 net; post-paid, \$1.60. Revised 1913.

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THE HALF MOON SERIES

Papers on Historic New York, 24 Monographs on Local History, published in the interest of the City History Club of New York. Edited by Maud Wilder Goodwin, Alice Carrington Royce, and Ruth Putnam: 10 cents each.

HISTORICAL GUIDE

POST ROADS AND MILESTONES.

BY GEORGE W. NASH, M. D.

The associations of highways and milestones is so intimate that a few words may be said of milestones in general. These stones, which now call forth a merely sentimental interest, were considered by our forefathers a necessity. In 1788 the State of New York passed the following: "As milestones are a great public convenience, removing or damaging any milestone is punishable by a fine of three pounds for such damage, part to go to the informant, part to be applied to the repair of the damage, and a third part to be paid to the overseers of the town in which the offence shall be committed." If unable to pay a fine, the party was to suffer thirty days' imprisonment. This law still remains in effect except that a term of imprisonment of two years may be imposed.

No less person than Benjamin Franklin selected the positions for many milestones along the highways, when as Postmaster General, in a specially contrived wagon, he measured off the miles at which the stones should be erected. Some of these so-called Franklin Milestones are still standing, one of them being on the Milford Road in Stratford, Conn.

The first two or three milestones in Manhattan are of white stone, then a brown stone is used the rest of the way up the river until Red Hook is reached, when again a white stone is used. While mostly Arabic numerals are used in milestone inscriptions, occasionally we find the Roman numbers, as on the XXIV milestone at Scarsdale, N. Y.

In early days the people of New Amsterdam felt the need of communication with the outer world, especially with their neighbors and kinspeople at Fort Orange. In the winter when the river was frozen over, it was a comparatively easy matter to arrange this communication, although the post carrier's task was anything but a pleasant one as he skirted the shores of the wilderness and rounded the points through the gorges against the cold north wind, while skating his lonely way to Albany, with Indians often lurking along the route. Something more permanent was needed, and in 1669, the Albany

Post Road was established. This was so successful that three years later a road was opened from New York to Boston, by order of Governor Lovelace. On January 1, 1673, a mounted post was instituted, among the multifarious duties being the carrying of the mails; it was not until 1772 that a stage coach appeared carrying passengers at the rate of four pence a mile.

At that time the City Hall was on Wall Street, at the corner of Nassau, where now stands the Sub-Treasury. Broadway up to St. Paul's was opened mainly to reach the Post Road where Park Row now begins, any further development of the street being undreamed of, even to accommodate the outlying farms along the Hudson. From the site of the Post Office the Post Road ran through Park Row, up the Bowery and Fourth Avenue to Madison Square (Excursion V, Section II) whence it turned and twisted northward over toward the East River, then doubled on itself. About Eighty-sixth Street it entered the boundaries of the present Central Park, went through McGown's Pass; thence continued more or less steadily to the northwest until it struck the lines of Broadway and Kingsbridge Road, when it went soberly along to the toll bridge over Spuyten Duyvil Creek (Excursion IV, 2). After getting well over the bridge, the road soon separated into the *Albany Post Road*, following Broadway through Yonkers and up the river; and the *Boston Post Road*, going up the hill to the right across to Williamsbridge, thence across country through Eastchester to New Rochelle, and beyond to Boston. So long ago as the English occupation, the people of New York, feeling crowded, overflowed into Harlem, whence the Dutch farmers casting their eyes across the Kills, saw a country "fair to look upon." Means of getting across were soon considered and a ferry established connecting with the road to Harlem which branched off from the Post Road at Central Park. (Excursion IV, Section 1). This ferry was at about Third Avenue and One Hundred and Thirty-first Street and a bridge was built in 1795. As the lower Bronx section across the Kills grew, old trails were developed, the early Westchester Path becoming a Post Road, following the line of Third Avenue and Boston Road to Bronx Park and then northeast, until it joined the early road some distance above, thus making quite a cut-off from New York to this junction, saving the long detour around Kingsbridge. Lonely as the road was, it was not without interesting features. Hardly had the traveler left the starting point when he arrived at the first Kissing Bridge, near Chatham Square; then came the milestones telling slowly, but steadily, the

progress made, and, as taverns and road houses were always convenient, there was ever a place for rest and refreshment. Among the old road houses may be mentioned the Bull's Head Tavern, near the first milestone, where the friends of the traveler who had accompanied him thus far, drank to his health and safety on his journey to the wilderness beyond.

At the second milestone, where Cooper Union now stands, was the Bowery Village Church. Cato's Road House at Fifty-second Street was a noted hostelry; at Seventy-second Street was another Kissing Bridge.

That part of the road near McGown's Pass has a special interest from its connection with the march of the British before the Battle of Harlem Heights and the presence of Forts Clinton and Fish. At the bridge across Spuyten Duyvil Creek, also a Kissing Bridge, there was a celebrated tavern well described by Madame Knight where sleighing parties came out from town for their frolics. Thence the traveler on either of the diverging Post Roads had more time for the enjoyment of the scenery, as the evidences of civilization faded away and the wilderness opened before him broken only occasionally by village or hamlet.

According to the old maps there was, starting from the City Hall in Wall Street, a stone for every mile in what is now Manhattan and the Bronx. With the erection of the present City Hall (1803-12) these milestones were replaced to bring them in conformity with the new starting point. This accounts for the apparent discrepancies in their names. Some of the milestones have disappeared, while others have had a varied experience. Some of the stones have been used by bill posters; one was rescued from a police station and now stands in good surroundings not at all embarrassed by the falsehood showing on its face; another was removed from a tottering position in a neglected section of the road and now occupies a place safe from destruction; one stone that stood in the way of public improvement was apparently improved off the earth; another reposes in a back yard uptown, while still another has its resting place in a cellar.

Milestones in Manhattan.

1. Bowery, opposite Rivington Street.
2. Third Avenue, between Sixteenth and Seventeenth Streets.
4. Third Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street.
5. Third Avenue and Seventy-seventh Street.
7. Third Avenue and One Hundred and Seventeenth Street.

7. Another stone, now stored at 107 West One Hundred and Twenty-second Street. (The duplicate 7 Milestone was probably on the eastern Post Road after it branched off the old Post Road near Central Park.)
9. One Hundred and Fifty-second Street, between Amsterdam and St. Nicholas Avenues.
10. 561 West One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Street.
11. In Roger Morris Park (see p. 159).
12. At entrance to Isham Park (see p. 175).

Milestones in the Bronx

10. One Hundred and Sixty-eighth Street and Boston Road.
13. Boston Road, near Pelham Parkway (this stone has lately disappeared and may be in the vicinity).
15. Boston Road, near Eastchester.
15. Albany Avenue, near Spuyten Duyvil Parkway (see p. 184).

Milestones in Brooklyn

- At Sheepshead Bay, corner of Neck Road and Ryder's Lane. Inscription reads: "8 Miles and () quarters to Brockland Ferry."
- At Van Pelt Manor, New Utrecht; has two inscriptions: one reads: "8¼ mile to N. York Ferry This Road To Denys's Ferry 2½ Mile." The other reads, "10½ Mile to N. York Ferry This Road. To Jamaica 15 Mile."
- At King's Highway, within fence line, left side, 100 feet from Ocean Avenue. Inscription: "6 Mile to Ye Ferry."

Milestones in Queens. (All between Long Island City and Flushing.)

- At Jackson Avenue, near Grinnell Avenue: "5 Miles to 34th Street Ferry. 1 Mile to Flushing Bridge." *Disappeared.*
- At Jackson, near Kelly Avenue: "3 Miles to 34th Street Ferry, 3 Miles to Flushing Bridge." *Disappeared.*
- At Jackson, near Hulst Avenue: "2 Miles to 34th Street Ferry, 4 Miles to Flushing Bridge."

Milestone in Richmond.

- Formerly at corner of Signs Road and Richmond Turnpike, now at 154 Stuyvesant Place, in the Museum of the Staten Island Association of Arts and Sciences. Inscription reads: "() miles to N. Yorke."

MILESTONES

ADDENDA, 1912

(From a theatre programme of "The African Company")

THEATRE IN MERCER STREET

In the rear of the 1 Mile Stone Broadway

THE AFRICAN CO., ETC.

Harper's Magazine, June-Nov., 1889, p. 133

As historians know nothing of a theatre here, this was probably a company of negro amateurs who played in New York in 1820-21. Old residents remember a milestone in front of old St. Thomas' Church, Broadway and Houston Street.

In tearing down an old residence in Greenwich at 102 Christopher Street in 1910 a block of brown stone 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 10 inches wide and 9 inches thick was discovered (now at 380 Bleecker Street) bearing the inscription, "9 Miles from Camp," and at the bottom some undecipherable figures. It is doubtful whether "Camp" refers to a camp of Revolutionary days or to some popular roadhouse in upper Manhattan.

NOTES ON MILESTONES

By HOPPER STRIKER MOTT

On Sept. 6, 1769, the Common Council ordered paid a bill of £8:11:2 for 16 stones supplied by George Lindsay (Mins. C. C. Vol. VII.: 178); Chap. XXI, Laws 14th George III, passed March 9, 1774, provided a penalty of £3 for defacing any milestone, hand, pointer or any other monument erected for the direction of travellers along the public roads, or in default, imprisonment in the common gaol for the space of two months. If the defacement be committed by a slave and the fine remain unpaid, imprisonment with 39 lashes on the bare back is prescribed if said forfeiture be not paid within 6 days after conviction.

The date of placing the stones on the Albany Post Road was 1769, as confirmed by the carving of this date on the ninth milestone, which formerly stood at the corner of Harlem Lane (now St. Nicholas Avenue) at 140th Street.

During Franklin's occupation of the Postmaster Generalship, and, in accordance with the terms of his appointment, a line of posts was laid out. As he was in office but a year (1775-6) and the route to be measured extended from Massachusetts to Georgia, it is impossible that he marked and set out the entire distance.

Christopher Colles, an engineer of note, surveyed the Post Road in 1789 from Federal Hall, in Wall Street, and noted thereon the position of the stones. He mapped the road from New York to Kingsbridge, and on other pages that to Albany. The survey locates the 1st and 2d miles on the Bowery Lane, and then follows the bed of the Post Road over New York Lane and Madison Square. The site of the 3d stone is placed about opposite 24th Street, near the juncture of the Bloomingdale Road.

On May 10, 1813, the Common Council authorized the erection of a new set of stones, with the present City Hall as a starting point. These guides marked the passing miles on the Boston Road, No. 1 being at Rivington Street and the Bowery.

MILESTONES IN BLOOMINGDALE

That there was a series running up the Bloomingdale Road is proved by the following evidence. The 3d stone, as Colles has shown, was near 24th Street, at the junction of the Post Road.

This advertisement from the *Columbian* of June 6, 1815, has been found:

"A stray steer was found on the premises of the subscriber on the 5th of August last. The owner may have the said steer by proving property and paying all reasonable charges.

"Isaac Varian Jun.

"Bloomingdale—3 mile stone."

This also fixes the Bloomingdale name as extending as far south as Twenty-third Street.

The fourth stone must have been at about Forty-Fourth Street and we have this advertisement from the *Mercantile Advertiser* of December 10, 1814, confirming the location there:

"To let for one or more years, the farm at Bloomingdale, near the four mile stone, known by the name of Eden's Farm, consisting of about 22 acres of land, on which are two dwelling houses and 2 farms and to which may be added 2 pieces of pasture land of about 10 acres each. Apply to

"John Jacob Astor, cor. Pine and Pearl Streets."

The evidence for saying that there was a second series marking tended as far south as Forty-first Street. It was acquired by Astor under foreclosure in 1803 for \$25,000. So much for the distances from Wall Street.

The evidences for saying that there was a second series marking the distance from the City Hall is as follows: We have personally seen a stone which stood on the Road at Fifty-fourth Street during our boyhood, which was marked "Four miles from N. Y."

In John Austin Stevens' notes to the *History of the Chamber of Commerce*, p. 314, he says: "The five mile stone stands near the corner of Seventy-fourth Street and the Bloomingdale Road, opposite grounds lately owned by Pelatiah Perit (20th President of the Chamber) and the 6 mile stone near Ninety-sixth Street, in front of the property of Dr. Williams."

The *Evening Post* announced that John Moir opened the Bloomingdale Academy in 1815, located 5 miles from the city, on the Bloomingdale Road. This was at Seventy-fourth Street.

Samuel Beman, A. M., opened a boarding school for small boys in 1838 at the six mile stone, situated "on Dr. Valentine Mott's beautiful mansion grounds." The house stood at Ninety-fourth Street.

The 7 mile stone was at One Hundred and Sixteenth Street and the 8 at One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street, a half mile south of the junction of the Bloomingdale and Kingsbridge Roads at One Hundred and Forty-seventh Street.



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ELEVENTH MILESTONE UNVEILING, MAY 30, 1912.

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